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PTQ3146

RELEASED IN PART  
B1, 1.4(D)

PAGE 01 CARACA 00310 01 OF 02 070015Z  
ACTION WHA-00

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|------|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| INFO | LOG-00  | COR-01 | CIAE-00 | DODE-00 | SRPP-00 | VC-00   | TEDE-00 |
|      | INR-00  | L-00   | VCE-00  | AC-01   | NSAE-00 | NSCE-00 | OMB-01  |
|      | PA-00   | PM-00  | PRS-00  | ACE-00  | P-00    | SP-00   | SS-00   |
|      | TRSE-00 | T-00   | USIE-00 | PMB-00  | DRL-01  | G-00    | SAS-00  |
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O 041921Z FEB 03  
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9773  
INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
WHA COLLECTIVE  
AMEMBASSY LIMA  
AMEMBASSY QUITO  
AMEMBASSY MEXICO  
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ  
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA  
AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA  
NSC WASHDC  
USCINCSO MIAMI FL  
USINT HAVANA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000310

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDED WHA COLLECTIVE)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/03/2012  
TAGS: PGOV, PREL, PHUM, OAS, VE  
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PAGE 02 CARACA 00310 01 OF 02 070015Z  
SUBJECT: SIGNATURE COLLECTION CAMPAIGN SURPASSES  
EXPECTATIONS

REF: 02 CARACAS 3580

CLASSIFIED BY: AMB. CHARLES S. SHAPIRO FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

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SUMMARY  
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1. (C) THE NGO SUMATE ORGANIZED THE FEBRUARY 2 NATIONWIDE  
SIGNATURE COLLECTION FOR NINE PETITIONS, INCLUDING ONE FOR  
PRESIDENT CHAVEZ'S RECALL AND ANOTHER FOR A CONSTITUTIONAL

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AMENDMENT TO SHORTEN THE PRESIDENT'S TERM IN THREE AND A HALF WEEKS, ASSISTED BY OVER 270,000 VOLUNTEERS. THE ORGANIZERS OF THE "FIRMAZO," OR ALTERNATIVE REFERENDUM, WOULD NOT SPECULATE AS TO HOW MANY SIGNATURES THEY COLLECTED, BUT POLITICAL LEADERS ESTIMATE THE NUMBERS AT NEARLY 5.5 MILLION.

SUMATE VIEWS THE ALTERNATIVE REFERENDUM'S APPARENT SUCCESS AS PROOF THAT THE PEOPLE CAN SUCCEED WHERE INSTITUTIONS FAIL.  
END SUMMARY.

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THE PEOPLE SPEAK  
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[REDACTED]  
SUMATE COMPILED AND VERIFIED MORE THAN TWO MILLION SIGNATURES FOR THE CONSULTATIVE REFERENDUM LAST NOVEMBER (REFTEL). WHEN  
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IT BECAME OBVIOUS THAT THE CONSULTATIVE REFERENDUM WAS DEAD, THEY HELPED ORGANIZE THE FEBRUARY 2 MULTI-PETITION CAMPAIGN SOME OPPOSITION LEADERS ARE CLAIMING GATHERED NEARLY 5.5 MILLION SIGNATURES. OF THE NINE PETITIONS AVAILABLE FOR SIGNATURE AT "VOTING" STATIONS, THE ONES GARNERING THE MOST SUPPORT ARE THE PETITIONS CALLING FOR CHAVEZ'S RECALL, THE PETITION CALLING FOR AN AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION SHORTENING THE PRESIDENT'S TERM OF OFFICE TO FOUR YEARS, AND THE PETITION CALLING FOR THE FORMATION OF A NATIONAL CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY TO CHANGE THE CONSTITUTION.

[REDACTED]  
3. (C) "IT IS (THE OPPOSITION'S) RESPONSIBILITY TO LET THE PEOPLE'S MANDATE BE HEARD. THEY CANNOT CHOOSE AMONGST THEMSELVES WHICH MANDATE IS BEST--ALL WILL BE FOLLOWED THROUGH WITH, BECAUSE IT IS THE PEOPLE'S WILL. ARTICLE 72 OF THE CONSTITUTION STATES THAT TO RECALL CHAVEZ'S MANDATE, 20% OF REGISTERED VOTERS MUST SIGN. FOR A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT, ARTICLE 341 STATES THAT 15% OF REGISTERED VOTERS MUST SIGN (APPROXIMATELY 1.8 MILLION SIGNATURES). A NATIONAL CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY, ACCORDING TO ARTICLE 348, REQUIRES 15% OF THE POPULATION AS WELL.

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[REDACTED]  
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(TRADITIONALLY, THE MILITARY PROVIDES POLLING STATION

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SECURITY, AND GUARANTEES THAT BALLOTS REACH THE NATIONAL  
ELECTORAL COUNCIL (CNE).) WITHOUT SUCH SUPPORT, MANY PEOPLE  
FEARED GOVERNMENT SUPPORTERS WOULD ATTACK THE PETITION  
SIGNERS. "PEOPLE WERE SCARED," SAID [REDACTED] AGREED.  
"THE GOVERNMENT SENT OUT VERY CLEAR MESSAGES THROUGH DEPUTIES  
LIKE CILIA FLORES AND DARIO VIVAS," HE EXPLAINED, "WHO  
CLAIMED THAT THE PETITION DRIVE WAS UNCONSTITUTIONAL, AND  
SAID THAT 'REAL REVOLUTIONARIES SHOULD FIGHT IT.'"  
FORTUNATELY, THE VIOLENCE WAS MINIMAL--JUST ONE PERSON WAS  
SERIOUSLY INJURED BY A GROUP OF FIVE TO TEN PEOPLE THROWING  
ROCKS AND FIREWORKS, ACCORDING TO NEWS REPORTS.

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PLANNING THE "FIRMAZO"  
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5. (C) SUMATE SAID PLANNING FOR THE FEBRUARY 2 BEGAN JUST  
THREE AND A HALF WEEKS AGO, WHEN IT BECAME APPARENT THAT THE  
SUPREME COURT (TSJ) WOULD STRIKE DOWN THE CONSULTATIVE  
REFERENDUM. WORKING WITHIN THE DCC, SUMATE ARGUED THAT THE  
OPPOSITION SHOULD NOT SIMPLY RESPOND TO THIS DISAPPOINTMENT  
WITH ANOTHER MARCH. "WE WANTED SOMETHING TANGIBLE, SOMETHING  
PROFOUND," [REDACTED] EXPLAINED. ONCE THE DCC AGREED ON THE  
APPROACH, SUMATE BEGAN WORK, VISITING RADIO AND TELEVISION  
STATIONS PERSONALLY TO EXPLAIN THE PLAN. "THE MEDIA EMBRACED

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|      | INR-00  | L-00   | VCE-00  | AC-01   | NSAE-00 | NSCE-00 | OMB-01  |
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USCINCSO MIAMI FL  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 CARACAS 000310

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDE WHA COLLECTIVE)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/03/2012

TAGS: PGOV, PREL, PHUM, OAS, VE

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SUBJECT: SIGNATURE COLLECTION CAMPAIGN SURPASSES  
EXPECTATIONS

THE IDEA, AND WE GOT NATIONWIDE COVERAGE FOR THE EVENT,"  
[REDACTED] SAID. SUMATE EXPANDED ITS NETWORK FROM APPROXIMATELY  
8,000 VOLUNTEERS IN NOVEMBER 2002, TO OVER 270,000 VOLUNTEERS  
NATIONWIDE. SUMATE ORGANIZED AND STAFFED OVER 3,500 POLLING  
CENTERS BOTH WITHIN VENEZUELA AND OVERSEAS, WITH MULTIPLE  
POLLING SITES IN CITIES SUCH AS MADRID, MIAMI, NEW YORK, AND  
HOUSTON. "OUR PHONES WERE RINGING OFF THE HOOK WITH PEOPLE  
ASKING HOW THEY COULD HELP," SAID [REDACTED]

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6. (C) SUPPORT FOR THE SIGNATURE DRIVE WAS NOT LIMITED TO  
AREAS TRADITIONALLY OPPOSED TO CHAVEZ, [REDACTED] CLAIMED. IN  
CHAVEZ'S HOME STATE OF BARINAS, [REDACTED] REPORTED VOTER TURNOUT  
OF 38 PERCENT OF REGISTERED VOTERS. THIS IS A SIGNIFICANT  
CONSIDERING THAT IN THE 1999 ELECTIONS, VOTER TURNOUT WAS 44  
PERCENT, ACCORDING TO PLAZ. EVEN POLLING STATIONS IN  
CARACAS'S POORER, TRADITIONALLY PRO-CHAVEZ NEIGHBORHOODS LIKE  
PETARE AND CATIA HAD A HIGH TURNOUT, [REDACTED] SAID.

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DEMOCRACY AT WORK WHEN INSTITUTIONS FAIL  
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8. (U) IN INTERVIEWS TO THE PRESS, VICE PRESIDENT JOSE VICENTE RANGEL CALLED THE SIGNATURE COLLECTION A "POSITIVE" ACT IN THAT IT DISTANCED THE OPPOSITION FROM COUP-PLOTTING AND TERRORISM. HOWEVER, RANGEL SAID THE GOV WOULD NOT RECOGNIZE THE OPPOSITION'S INITIATIVES, AND DOUBTED THAT THE CNE WOULD, EITHER. FATHERLAND FOR EVERYONE (PPT) SECRETARY GENERAL JOSE ALBORNOZ TOLD REPORTERS FEBRUARY 3 THAT THE PPT WOULD CHALLENGE THE AMENDMENT PETITION IN THE TSJ. ALBORNOZ ASSERTED THAT THE CHANGES PROPOSED IN THE DRAFT CONSTITUTE A REFORM, NOT AN AMENDMENT. HE ALSO PLAYED DOWN THE TURNOUT ON FEBRUARY 2, WHICH THE OPPOSITION PLACES AT MORE THAN 4 MILLION, CALLING IT A COMPLETE MEDIA LIE.

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COMMENT  
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